

6 March 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, Foreign Broadcast Information Service

FROM : Chief, Nicosia Bureau

SUBJECT : Foreign National Wage Administration

One problem with conformity is that of fully recognizing what you are conforming to. In the case of FBIS trying to achieve conformity with all prevailing area wage plans and schedules, your memorandum of 15 February implies that we must adopt a wage scale which is identical with the wage scale in the embassy. One major danger in this approach for Nicosia Bureau is that we are situated at a small embassy which does not have the need to hire well-educated and skilled local employees. This is far different from a post such as Hong Kong, which has several local employees doing real analytical work and pays them accordingly. This enabled FBIS to fit its employees into the Hong Kong scale, while finding that the Nicosia scale falls far short.

Our professional scale in Nicosia is actually based on the FSL scale. We have three scales above the local scale, each representing an additional 7 percent increment which we felt was justified by the skills required for our jobs. I believe that we have acted correctly in maintaining such a scale. We have achieved conformity with the mission in comparable jobs and offered additional pay to those for whom there is no embassy equivalent. I feel strongly that we have a good case and should continue to press it as long as possible. I would hope that [redacted] study conducted for PMCD last year will back us up on the skills required for the FBIS monitorial job, while setting out uniform grade levels for equivalent jobs in the various FBIS bureaus.

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A revision of the top levels of our employees does not merely affect the top levels. It would mean downgrading a number of people in lower levels. For example, at Nicosia Bureau an ordinary monitor is at the next to highest grade in the FSL scale. To provide any room for advancement and any differentiation for seniority and skill, we shall have to lower the grades of the lower ranks.

In Nicosia, and in most other bureaus, the senior people are at the top step of their grades. All but one of the senior monitors in Nicosia are at the top of their grades and even the one exception has only one step to go. Thus the only device open to us to soften the blow would be retained rate, not placement in higher steps.

If finally forced to adopt the embassy scale, we have one other course of action, which is try raising the embassy scale. However, I do not expect much cooperation from State on this, because it would eventually cost them money. The bureaucracy abhors a vacuum, and there is no question but that embassy employees would soon start drifting into grades created for FBIS monitors.

I am sure that you fully appreciate the personnel problems likely to flow from achieving full conformity with the embassy. We will probably lose experienced monitors to retirement as their reduced annual increments would not make continued working profitable. We would also find ourselves in a much more difficult recruiting stance, with much less to offer applicants. This becomes a special problem when trying to recruit TCN's to come to an area where they have no particular desire to be. This problem will be especially acute in Nicosia, where there are many monitors eligible or near-eligible for retirement, where new monitors must be hired from other countries, and where, especially in the case of our essential Arabic team, there is insufficient good will for them to believe that FBIS can do nothing to rectify the situation.

We should certainly try to delay full implementation as long as possible. One measure which might stop us from getting swamped in a sea of immediate retirements might be to exempt all employees who are eligible to retire within five years or more or with 20 or more years service. Another procedure is to achieve conformity in stages. In the case of Nicosia Bureau, this would involve first a reduction in the number of professional steps from three to two, then after a certain period from two to one and finally to parity. This would at least prevent a sudden 3-grade demotion for some, while providing a breathing spell in which many of the senior employees would have a chance to retire before they were affected.

These approaches do not solve our problem about hiring new monitors, however, and I am very much afraid that this may prove our greatest problem. To attract people to leave their homes has in the past been accomplished through money and/or by utilizing a ready supply of refugees. In this part of the world, the refugee generation is dying out and few Arabs would choose Cyprus as their place of refuge anyway. We are finding in the Gulf that without sufficient monetary rewards, we have few takers for monitor jobs, and I am very much afraid that if we limit monitor salaries to the FSL limit here we might get a similar reaction. This will hardly help as we try to improve our capacity to monitor Muslim media.

I am sure that all concerned bureau chiefs will make much the same points. The subject is close to our hearts because the very survival of our bureaus may be affected. I know that you will try to postpone the hour of doom, and I wish you luck in making the point that FBIS did not establish high scales just to be a generous employer, but because it was necessary to attract the quality of monitor essential to our mission.

Sincerely,

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Nicosia Bureau Chief